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REPORT AND EVALUATION OF EXPERIMENTAL CLASS IN FRENCH (FRENCH 20) FIRST SEMESTER IN OPERATION.

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THIS EXPERIMENT TESTS CERTAIN INNOVATIONS IN THE PRESENTATION OF A FRENCH COURSE. THE COURSE COVERED, IN ONE SEMESTER, THE MATERIAL NORMALLY GIVEN IN TWO, AND WAS INTENDED TO IMPROVE THE STUDENTS' PROFICIENCY BY INTENSIVE CONTACT AND STILL MAINTAIN THE STANDARDS OF FORMAL EXPRESSION AND GRAMMAR. IT WAS GIVEN TWO SUCCESSIVE HOURS PER DAY FOR FIVE DAYS A WEEK TO REDUCE OUTSIDE INTERRUPTIONS. EIGHT UNITS OF CREDIT WERE GIVEN (NO PARTIALS, EVEN FOR HALF THE COURSE). THE CLASS WAS DESIGNED SPECIFICALLY FOR STUDENTS WITH A SPECIAL INTEREST IN THE LANGUAGE, NOT FOR THOSE NEEDING ONLY THE REGULAR PROGRAM. THE STUDENTS VARIED FROM SOME WITH NO KNOWLEDGE OF FRENCH TO OTHERS WITH CONSIDERABLE BACKGROUND IN IT. THIS HETEROGENEITY, PLUS DEFICIENCIES IN THE LANGUAGE LABORATORY AND AN INADEQUATE TEXT, PRODUCED SOME MINOR DIFFICULTIES. TWO INSTRUCTORS CONDUCTED THE CLASSES, ALTHOUGH THIS TOOK MUCH EXTRACURRICULAR COORDINATION AND PLANNING. THE COURSE WAS EVALUATED BY TEACHER OBSERVATION AND ANALYSIS, BY ORAL AND WRITTEN TESTS OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE, AND BY A SPECIAL STUDENT EVALUATION. COMPARISON OF TEST SCORES OF THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP AND THE SUCCESSIVE-SEMESTER GROUP SHOWED THE GREATER EFFECTIVENESS OF THE NEW SYSTEM. THE STUDENT EVALUATION SHOWED APPRECIATION OF THE VARIETY PROVIDED BY THE TEAM TEACHING, OF THE CARE SHOWN IN LESSON PREPARATION, AND OF THE INTENSIVE METHOD OF PRESENTATION. (HH)

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REPORT AND EVALUATION

EXPERIMENTAL CLASS IN FRENCH (FRENCH 20)

FIRST SEMESTER IN OPERATION

Research Study #68-5

prepared by

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EVALUATION OF EXPERIMENTAL CLASS IN FRENCH (FRENCH 20). FIRST SEMESTER IN OPERATION

ITEM I Summary of Purpose

A. The experimental course was set up to test the hypothesis that an intensive course in a foreign language (i.e., one providing a greater number of contact hours between the student and the target language) will provide significantly more measurable achievement in almost all areas of language learning than will a course given in the more usual one-contact hour way. The purpose of the course was to cover, in one semester's time, a minimum of at least the material normally allotted to two semesters of elementary language (i.e., Language 1 and 2); to increase the proficiency of the student in the areas of aural and written comprehension, of pronunciation, and of conversation to a point significantly above that usually attained in a regular class (of combined single-semester offerings of Language 1 and 2--one year pattern); to maintain the standard of formal expression and grammar so that it was approximately equal to that attained by a student in regular class.

B. The time allotted for the experimental course was exactly twice that of the regular class: two hours per day, five days a week, but with the two hours to be contiguous to minimize external interference (of other classes and of other activities).*

C. Eight units of credit were given for successful completion of the course. No partial credit was given, even if a student completed the first half of the course (roughly equivalent to Language 1) before withdrawing.

D. The concentrated or intensive course was not intended as a substitute for the regular program of language courses. It was meant as a supplement specifically designed for the student who is interested in using language as a living communication tool. Certain of the findings and intents of the program, however, are directly applicable to the regular pattern of scheduling and course development.

ITEM II Sources for the Evaluation that Follows

A. Teacher observation, consultation, and analysis of program development and results. A weekly diary was kept of progress, class activities, class reponse and achievement, test results, observations of weak spots, suggestions for improvement, etc.

* Actually, the French 20 class gained about ten minutes of additional classtime a day because it was not necessary to spend the first few minutes of the second hour getting acclimated to French.

B. The class performance throughout the semester is measured by oral and written tests and by the final examination. These elements were matched by similar items in the regular classes.

C. A Guide for Evaluation of Course by Student was drawn up, ditto'd, and distributed to the students in the special class at the very end of the semester. These permitted the student to discuss certain aspects of the class and to make suggestions by means of which the class might be made more successful from his point of view. The Student Evaluations were unsigned and were submitted to the professors in sealed envelopes.

ITEM III Evaluation and Discussion

A. Student Population and Drop-out Rate

1. The student population was very heterogeneous. Although it was hoped that the experimental course would be of special value to students with a minimum experience in French (i.e., one year of high school French at most), it was impossible to enforce this design because of the difficulties of contact with the student body during the pre-enrollment period (during the summer of 1967). As a result, the class was very large and included people with all conceivable backgrounds of French experience, from the student with no language background of any kind to those with not only formal language background in French and other languages but also with a history of living and travelling abroad. The diversity was apparent at once to the professors and increased the difficulty of their task enormously, since the ordinarily uncomplicated and simple French which must be used in a beginning class left many of the students bored, and any attempt to raise the level of sophistication to at least partially satisfy the latter caused the students with no background in French to become lost. After a slow start, however, a compromise was made which gave more attention to the "innocents" and which explained to the more linguistically sophisticated that they must be patient until the others caught up a bit. The professors decided then that something must be done to limit the class to the less-experienced students in the future and a printed form was devised which stated that the course was primarily for such students and that a student of more mature background might be required to give up his place in the class if it were required by a novice. As of this writing (during the second week of the second semester), this procedure has been in force. The results, however, will require a special evaluation of the screening idea. The second class in French 20 has an enrollment of only 21 and this may not meet the administrative requirements of class size and teacher utilization. It has been observed that if the idea of the class is a useful and valuable one, it should be useful in reference to any and all students, regardless of background and that better use might be made of the experienced students in the future as supplementary tutorial personnel.

The students in the class, in their evaluations, said that the diversity of background was bothersome at first, but that subsequently it gave a scope and breadth to the class which might otherwise have been impossible. In addition to this observation is the statistical fact that the top three students in the class at the end of the semester were those who had had no previous French.

2. The drop-out rate of the class was about normal. The class began with 42 students. At the end of the semester, there were 23, but of the Drop-outs, nine had reclassified to a French 1 class because they felt that they could not spare the time which was required for class preparation of the intensive course. Some of them worked, some of them had schedules which were too heavy. Only four transferred because they felt that they would do poorly in the Experimental Course. Of these four, it was evident to the professors of the Experimental Course and to the professor into whose French 1 they transferred that two would quite probably have been able to achieve the same level of performance in French 20 as they did in French 1. In other words, two people transferred because they had no confidence.

B. Team-Teaching and Planning

1. The class was conducted by two professors, Nadia Wilson and Ronald Farrar. The reaction to the team-teaching approach (by the students) was overwhelmingly favorable and verging on the enthusiastic. The students cited the experience of two different personalities, approaches, accents, and inter-action as being of special value and desirability. They also cited the necessity for the two teachers to mesh their teaching somewhat more closely and to integrate the planning better--a defect which the professors in question had always recognized but had been unable to ameliorate because of the heavy preparation and teaching load with which each had to cope, and because of additional professional duties and responsibilities. It is to be highly recommended here that some means be devised to grant the team the opportunity for some additional time to prepare the course work--either by a lapsed-time arrangement or by some feat of scheduling which permits them to consult daily. That the course was a success in spite of these difficulties redounds to the credit of the professors in charge who put in many extra-curricular hours before the semester began and during the course of it.

2. The students suggested that the team-teaching approach was also successful because there was a man and a woman. They indicated that the class escaped the tedium which could have been occasioned by the two hours daily through the change in teacher personalities and the concomitant change in the reaction of the students. The professors of the experimental class recommend highly the continuance of this approach.

C. Instructional Approach and Course Content

1. The instructional approach adopted was audio-lingual à la Lenard. The text, however, was the De Sauzé, Nouveau Cours Pratique de Francais. At the time of text selection, it was felt by Mr. Farrar that an experimental course should have asfew uncontrolled variables as possible. The major variable was, of course, the new class and the necessity for feeling one's way along. To add to this another variable such as a new book (the other French classes at LACC had just adopted the Lenard book) was deemed unwise. The De Sauzé had been used for number of years and while it was noticeably deficient in some areas and alsc had presentational defects, it was felt that at least it was a known evil. The Lenard text is being used with this semester's French 20 and the experience of the two professors is that it is far easier to work with than the De Sauzé and probably would have been less trouble last semester even though it was new at that time. The professors find that the Lenard text seems to lend itself very ably to the experimental course and provides a sequence quite compatible with that undertaken in the class.

2. The conversational approach adopted by the two professors last semester was eminently satisfactory and the class response was enthusiastic. By the end of the third week, students were able to carry on conversations with each other that involved talk about their homes--its rooms, colors, functions, etc., family, age, health, time, numbers up to fifty (mathematical problems of addition, subtraction, division, multiplication), date, days of week, weather, etc. In addition, the class was able to understand, because of the judicious selection of cognate usage and other devices, discussion and conversation on a much broader spectrum. Of course, some of the more experienced students tended to monopolize the conversation, but this was a controllable factor and had a certain amount of utility when properly directed. The procedure was devised to spend a half hour or so once a week in conversational groups within the classroom, in each of which a more experienced student was charged with the responsibility for directing the conversation. The class also met outside of the classroom for an hour of coffee and croissants and conversation; this particular activity produced a relaxed and different atmosphere and the students were particularly enthusiastic about it. It was decided to make such a gathering an integral part of the course and to meet in this way two or three times a term.

D. Testing

Testing for the French 20 class was one of the most challenging and at the same time most creative aspects of the experiment. It was necessary to devise instruments which would measure effectively both the student's progress and also his weak spots.

For the most part, the testing was intended to be primarily of the diagnostic type so that areas of difficulty might be pin-pointed and subsequently remedied before additional material was presented. The use of any English on the tests was avoided since it was considered to be not only detrimental to the student but also out-of-character, since little or no English was used in class and neither was it used in any of the many worksheets given to the students. Testing was of many types: oral conversation, oral questions to which oral answers were expected, oral questions to which written answers were expected, dictations, short surprise quizzes (the so-called "shotgun" quiz), short compositions, oral compositions, and finally, the more formal hour quizzes. Each hour quiz was intended to review all previous material as well as more recent work. The final examination was the only real test given--in terms of a penalty-type situation--and even it was little more than a review quiz of extended (two-hour) duration. The final did, however, cover everything in depth.

The students considered the shotgun quizzes to be the most useful and effective for them; they indicated a desire for even more than the usual four or five a week. They stated that since the professors did not (and should not) collect daily homework, the shotguns provided an incentive for regular study which was absolutely essential for successful completion of the course.

Initially, the dictation tests were of some value, but after the first few weeks of the class, they seemed to have more or less fulfilled their function, which was to encourage the student to make the connection between sound and written form. After this time, the grades for dictation were, in general, considerably higher than the student's average level of achievement. This indicated to the professors that the dictations had become of dubious importance.

The hour quizzes were generally, according to the students, well-constructed, informative, and challenging. The student critique ran the gamut from "I guess they were all right" to the enthusiastic remark that "the tests were masterpieces." 12 out of 21 students listed the tests as outstanding or better. Some students even went so far as to say that they were fun to take. There is no pedagogical law that says a test cannot be enjoyable, although it is rare that such a phenomenon occurs. As a parenthesis, there is a great deal of interesting experimentation and work to be done in the area of language testing and the teacher who relies on the old standby of English-to-target-language translation to determine what a student apparently knows is doing himself a disservice; he is shutting himself off from the truly satisfying experience of devising imaginative examinations which show teacher and student alike just how effective a given sequence of instructional material has been.

To develop an outstanding testing program, however, the teacher is forced to re-evaluate completely everything he knows and every technique he has been employing. Many instructors are unwilling to submit their methods to this kind of potentially deflative scrutiny.

The true criterion of test success, in the last analysis, is not the entertainment value of the instrument but rather the student's achievement. On the first test, this level of achievement was very high, as one might expect it to be. There were 13 A's (90% or above), 8 B's (80% and up), 10 C's (70%), 3 D's (60%), and 3 F's. The class median was 86%; the class mean was 81.8 (due mainly to one exceptionally low score of 47%); the standard deviation was 12.9. This first test was given during the third week; it should have been given sooner, but problems of organization, coordination, and the process of just getting the experimental class untracked prevented this from occurring. In subsequent semesters this problem should not arise (in fact, the first test for the second semester French 20 class was given during the second week). The second big test of the first semester was given during the fourth week; again, the results were outstanding: 13 A's, 11 B's, 7 C's, 1 D, 0 F's. The class median was 86%, mean 85.9%, and standard deviation only 9.8. The third test was the one which provided the pattern for student achievement during the remainder of the semester. From the third test on (with one exception) the class mean was about 76.8%, the median about 77.7%, and the standard deviation about 14.2. The final examination was somewhat below the normal average, but this is perhaps to be expected because of the attendant higher tension of a final examination and because of the extended period (two hours) of testing-- as well as because of the total amount of material covered. Mean on the final was 74.7%, median was 78%, and standard deviation was 15.9. Nevertheless, in terms of final grades in the course, there were 5 A's, 8 B's, 8 C's, 2 D's, and no F's or incompletes. For a comparison of the French 20 class with three French 2 classes the same semester, see chart on the next page.

E. The Language Laboratory

It was obvious as of the fourth week that the language laboratory was not being used efficiently or effectively. Most students were willing and eager to go, but there was almost no material available in the lab which could be used for this class. We were forced to use the tapes that accompany the text (De Sauzé) and these were at best only adequate. The professors had absolutely no time to prepare appropriate tapes themselves.

There were other problems connected with the lab, however, which would have limited the effectiveness of tapes and other aids no matter how good they might have been, especially the problem of when it was open.

TABLE 1

COMPARISON OF EXPERIMENTAL CLASS FRENCH 20 WITH THREE OTHER CLASSES (FRENCH 2) AT END OF FALL 67 SEMESTER

	French 20	French 2-A	French 2-B	French 2-C
Number originally in class	40	35	38	44
Number at end	23*	25	28	29
% drop-out	42.5%*	28.5%	26.5%	34%
Grade A and approx. % of class	5 (21.4%)	1 (4%)	1 (3.6%)	4 (13.8%)
Grade B and approx. % of class	8 (34.9%)	4 (16%)	5 (17.9%)	11 (37.9%)
Grade C and approx. % of class	8 (34.9%)	11 (44%)	12 (42.8%)	14 (48.3%)
Grade D and approx. % of class	2 (8.8%)	6 (24%)	7 (25%)	0
Grade F and approx. % of class	0	2 (8%)	3 (10.7%)	0
Grade of INCOMPLETE	0	1 (4%)	0	0
Class Average (Final Grades in Course): A 4, B 3, C 2, D 1, F 0; INC not included	2.7	1.8	1.8	2.6**

* This figure includes 9 reclassifications to French 1 for reasons discussed under Item III A2; a modified drop-out rate including these as remaining in French would be only 22.5%. French 20 reclassification was permitted up through the 9th week of the semester; normally reclassification is permitted through about the third week only.

** Classes in French 2 were of different instructional approaches. Class C was taught in an almost identical fashion to the French 20, but of course with only one teacher; classes A and B were more conventionally oriented.

During the first two weeks or so—by far the most important period for a beginning language class—the scheduling of available lab hours was a topsy-turvy mess. This was not the fault of the chairman of the Foreign Language Department who has this job of scheduling among many other jobs, but rather of an apparent plethora of problems revolving around the processing and hiring of student technicians to handle the lab. Since, as has been mentioned, the overwhelmingly greater effectiveness of the lab is to be found during the first few weeks of a semester and especially during the first two, to permit purely bureaucratic considerations to frustrate the instructional efficiency is inexcusable. There is another factor as well which helped to limit lab effectiveness and that factor is the obsolescence and antiquity of the lab at LACC. Not only does the equipment consistently operate at a sub-par mechanical level, but the activities which can be performed there are highly inefficient for assisting the student to acquire the skills which are desirable. In the case of French 20, the failure of the lab and lab work to perform the necessary functions of drill and repetition forced the professors to assume this burden—a fact which certainly reduced their total effectiveness.

F. Student Evaluation of the Course

The Guide for Evaluation of Course by Student, which was mentioned earlier under Item IIC, is too long to discuss in full now. Anyone wishing a copy of it may have one by asking either the professors or the Department Chairman, Mr. Carlos Whitney-Morrison, for it. What follows here will be a very brief summary of some of the findings and tallies.

Sixteen out of 23 students indicated that they had reached the point where they could very satisfactorily understand basic spoken French; four of those who indicated only an average comprehension said that pressure of outside work or studies or personal problems were the factors responsible for their not attaining a higher level of comprehension. They added that they could not fault the method of learning the language, however, which they thought was an excellent one. Likewise, 16 students were sure that if they had to rely on French to get along somewhere in the world, they could do it with more than moderate confidence. All but one of the students stated thay they felt they had a good basic feel for the language so that they might build on it and achieve proficiency. As an added bonus, four students claimed that they were switching their major to French. Naturally, one of the most exacting proofs for the success of the class will be the students' performance in subsequent French classes. It is obviously too early to judge now whether or not the French 20 students are performing satisfactorily in French 3, although the impression received from the students and the teachers of the advanced classes indicates that no serious problems are being encountered.

Since most of the students need 12 units of language anyway, it is perhaps irrelevant to mention that all but three or four have continued with French 3.

Eleven students were in favor of the usual process of a) presenting new concepts orally in French, b) practicing them orally in class in subsequent meetings, and c) using written worksheets and exercises to drill them in; nine students were substantially in favor of this process but offered additional suggestions as well; one student didn't like this way of handling things and suggested writing everything down first before working with it orally; this student also stated a preference for the course to be taught in English. The suggestions offered by the nine students mentioned above included some provocative ones. Anyone wishing to look these over is welcome to do so; it is eminently worthwhile to see what the student feels will work with him. This is a facet of education which teachers almost universally overlook, and one which could do more to upgrade instructional techniques and content than any other. It should be made clear here that student comments and suggestions were made for most of the items on the Guide. All are available for perusal.

Half of the students indicated that there was more work in the class than they had really expected, even though both professors had stressed that preparation time outside of class would be about three or four hours each day. Students, however, as any teacher is well-aware, tend to be over-optimistic concerning their ability to handle study and load responsibilities; this idealism is refreshing but the farther it verges from reality, the more of a burden it puts on the student.

The last item on the Evaluation Guide was the big question: it asked the student to suggest how the class could be made more successful and it also requested that he indicate those things experienced during the semester that he liked. There were many suggestions to improve the class, most of which had been incorporated in previous questions; the professors have taken cognizance of them and are attempting to put workable ones into practice this semester. It cannot be stressed too strongly here that the majority of suggestions were thoughtful ones based on an honest and analytical evaluation of the student's experience. There is no doubt that if some of these suggestions are implemented, it will make for an improvement in the course. Something that will contribute even more than these suggestions to the efficacy of the instructional approach however, because of the essentially normal psychology of the professors, is the appreciation expressed by almost all of the students for the great amount of interest, extra work, and preparation on the part of the teachers.

The professors can be forgiven if they quote a few of these student remarks here, because no matter what anyone says, it is the glow generated by the fact that others are aware of their efforts that makes teachers continue to give more than is normally necessary of their energy and creative imagination.

"I want very much to add that I loved the class and am probably more enthusiastic than others because I've taken two other languages under the standard language teaching methods and I know how much better I have progressed in French in only 20 weeks, as compared to 40 for one and 160 for the other. I feel very happy about this class and I am looking forward to French 3 and 8 for I feel I have a very good start. Thank you both for your fine efforts."

"Both teachers in the course were unusually creative and interesting in their approach to the subject. Both worked very, very hard to sincerely help us in any way they could. And it is unusual to find teachers who welcome criticism from students. Thank you for all your help and patience."

"I have enjoyed this class even though it was demanding at times. However, at other times the class was quite exciting. I feel the course was a good experience and wish there were more courses available. I think this was one course I will always remember."

"I would like to commend both professors for their enthusiasm and excellent preparation. That was part of the reason that most students responded so well. If I could take a similar course in other subjects I wouldn't hesitate a second."

"I think the concept of French Twenty is a real winner in academic training. It seems to eliminate that gap of ignorance during the change of semesters. It also reduces the inefficiency in covering the material. On a more personal note it has been a rare and wonderful experience to be taught by two instructors who want to teach fifty minutes regardless of the obstacles."

"Mr. Farrar and Madame Wilson I like both as people and as teachers. I hope this program is continued at LACC and soon becomes the national accepted way of learning the first two years of a language. And the real question—'If I had to do it over...YES!'"

"The course as a whole was the most unique experience in a classroom situation I've ever had. The work load in the class was more than I had expected, but the strange thing about it all was that I didn't resent the work. I enjoyed the course so much that I even enjoyed the 'agony' of it all.

The students provided the right atmosphere of competition, the professors in the team teaching method provided variety of presentation and variety in the material. The basic principles of the course, to bring across an understanding of basic spoken French through oral conversation followed by written practice was what appealed to me most in the course. I had found that this was the best way for me to study a foreign language and this course had certainly helped me to learn, and to be able to get along in French. I do hope that this course is continued, furthermore I hope that similar courses are developed on the higher level. Thanks to the instructors for their hard work, now I can continue further studies in French."

* *

ADDENDUM:

One of the professors of the French 20 course, Mr. Farrar, has as part of his program during the Spring 1968 semester at LACC a French 1 course. Since the submission of the foregoing manuscript for typing, it has been possible for him to make some direct comparisons between the French 20 class and his French 1 class in terms of test achievement. Three tests given to the experimental group have also been given to his French 1 class. The teaching approach is the same. The main differences lie in the facts that the French 1 class is almost twice the size of the French 20, that it comes at 1:00 p.m. in the afternoon, and that in terms of previous French experience, it is completely heterogeneous. Nevertheless, some significant differences have emerged which are noted in Table II below.

TABLE II
COMPARISON OF PERFORMANCES ON SAME TEST INSTRUMENT BY FRENCH 20 AND FRENCH 1 CLASSES DURING SPRING 1968

Exam	Class	Number	Possible Points	Mean Errors	Avg. %	Median Errors	Range of Errors	Standard Dev.
#1	F20	18	100	*16.6	83.4	8.5	93	23.2
	Fr1	31	100	35.5	64.5	32.5	93	21.7
#2	F20	20	139	*31.3	77.0	21.0	99	27.1
	Fr1	32	139	39.7	71.5	38.5	99.5	23.4
#3	F20	16	186	*40.4	76.0	37.0	87	26.8
	Fr1	29	170	62.7	63.0	55.5	118	60.7

* On each of the three tests there was one student in the French 20 group who had a percentage of 0 or almost 0; excluding this student from the statistics, the F20 mean would be 11.6, 22.1, 34.2, respectively. Other stats would also be significantly higher, especially the standard deviation: 11.2, 18.0, 23.5, respectively.